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ANALYSIS OF IRAN'S POLITICAL LEADERSHIP, (U)  
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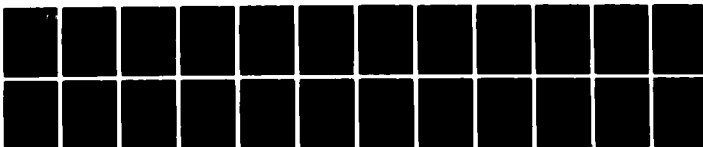
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ANALYSIS OF IRAN'S POLITICAL LEADERSHIP  
By Eric Hooglund

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The government of Iran is based upon the Constitution of the Islamic Republic which was drawn up by an Assembly of Experts during the summer of 1979 and approved in a popular referendum in December, 1979. Since the establishment of the governmental institutions during the first part of 1980, an increasingly larger proportion of personnel for authoritative positions have been drawn from the ranks of the Shi'i Muslim clergy. In addition, all other major decision making roles within the government have been occupied by non-clerical politicians who are closely allied to the clergy in the dominant political party, the Islamic Republican Party ( IRP ). Consequently, it is reasonable to assume that the Iranian clergy and their lay supporters constitute the current political elite of Iran and can be expected to maintain their dominant role as long as the existing constitutional arrangements remain the principles upon which the government is organized.

While the constitution does provide the legal basis for the clergy's control of the government, how such control is to be exercised is influenced by various factors which are only marginally, if at all, related to constitutional law. As in other countries, efforts to control the government are essentially political activities; therefore, in order to understand the operation of the government, it is necessary to appreciate the nature of politics in post-revolutionary Iran. An examination of the factors which directly affect politics can help to provide this appreciation. For example, one can study the patterns of recruitment into the new elites of clergy and their lay allies; examine how they utilize the different institutions of government; and assess the salient political issues which are the primary sources of unity and/or discord among the elites. These three factors have had the most impact upon Iranian politics since the revolution and will be examined in detail in this paper.

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I. The Political Elite

This paper was prepared for the Department of State as part of its external research program. Views or conclusions contained herein should not be interpreted as representing the official opinion or policy of the Department of State.

### A. The Clergy

The clergy presently dominate Iranian politics. However, the clergy does not constitute a monolithic group. While Ayatollah Sayyid Ruhollah al-Musavi Khomeini is the supreme political leader among the clergy, he is not considered to be infallible and in purely religious matters is ranked as an equal, and by some scholars as an inferior, to at least five other clergymen of his own generation and scholarly attainment. A principle issue which separates Khomeini from his peers is that of clerical political activism. Indeed, political activism is a major source of controversy within the Shi'i clergy, dividing the entire religious establishment into at least two distinct groups. Essentially, Khomeini and like-minded members of the clergy believe that religious scholars have a duty to supervise the government of an Islamic society. Those members of the clergy who reject this view believe that political power is inherently corrupting, and therefore the clergy should limit its political role to one of advising government officials on the compatibility of government laws with Islamic principles. Obviously, it is the former group which has been most actively involved in politics since the revolution.

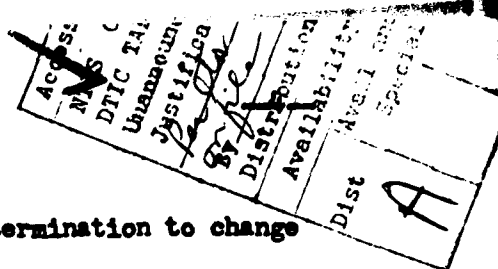
Before assessing the relative strengths and weaknesses of the two groups of clergy, it is necessary to define the boundaries of the term "clergy" in present day Iran. There are no authoritative estimates of the number of clergy. Press accounts since 1978 have presented various estimates ranging from 60,000 to 150,000 clerics. The lower figure is probably more realistic. Government statistics before the revolution cited figures of 12,500-14,00 (depending upon which official source is consulted) persons gainfully employed as religious preachers and teachers. This figure included only those people occupied full-time in the management of mosques, seminaries, and certain religious charitable institutions. In addition, there were twice as many people who performed religious functions on a part-time or irregular basis, or had abandoned religious activities; all such persons were commonly perceived by the public as part of, at least marginally,

the clergy. Also, by 1978 there were between 10,000 and 13,000 students—different sources cite different figures—in the theological seminaries (madrasehs), 80 percent of whom studied in the colleges at Qom. If we assume that all three groups identified with the clergy, then the clerical establishment easily numbers between 50,000 - 60,000; in addition, the influence of the clergy since the revolution undoubtedly has prompted several hundreds to join their ranks, at least at the student level. The professional, part-time and student components of the clergy all have been affected by the clerical debate over political activism. In general, it seems that a majority of all three elements support the views of Khomeini with regard to political participation by the clergy.

#### 1. Clerical Political Activists

The most important element of the clergy are the approximately 14,000 professionals from whom are recruited the political cadres of the religious class. The professionals include both the more numerous mosque preachers (mullahs) and the more prestigious scholars ('ulema). The term "ayatollah" is reserved only for clerics who are recognized as scholars, although scholars may also do some preaching. The status of ayatollah is achieved by consensus; about 100 men are widely recognized as ayatollahs; another 100 are often referred to as ayatollahs, but their status has not been widely affirmed. Ayatollahs are recognized as the most authoritative interpreters of both religious doctrine and religious laws. Devout Shi'i Muslims in Iran believe that they should follow the opinions and example of one living ayatollah in the management of their own lives; however, each believer is free to choose whomever of the most eminent 'ulema is the most appealing. In practice this means that no single ayatollah can achieve as paramount a position in religious matters as that enjoyed by the pope within the Roman Catholic Church.

Since the revolution the followers of Khomeini have been trying to elevate his position within the clerical hierarchy to the status of a paramount religious leader. Their preferences for the use of such terms as imam and faqih in re-



ference to Khomeini are thus reflections of their determination to change the customary practice of having several co-equal religious leaders. These efforts have been resented by some members of the clergy, in particular by the five men who prior to the revolution shared with Khomeini the distinction of being "grand ayatollahs" (ayatollah uzzma). However, the grand ayatollahs and their supporters within the clerical establishment have been reluctant to oppose Khomeini and his associates directly or publically. Their hesitation can be attributed, at least in part, to their tradition of avoiding involvement in politics; and the Khomeini phenomenon<sup>on</sup> is very political. The grand ayatollahs have indicated their lack of enthusiasm for the use of religion to serve political ends through veiled criticisms and silence. Such an approach has not been effective, at least to date, in dissuading most clerics from co-operating with Khomeini.

Khomeini's clerical support is solidly based in the junior ranks of the clergy. A significant proportion of the second rank ayatollahs are behind him. Most prominent of these are Ayatollahs Hadi Khusrushahi, Mohammad Rza Mahdavi-Kani, and Husayn 'Ali Montazari. Throughout 1979 probably a majority of the second-rank ayatollahs were with Khomeini, and it was from among them that founders of the IRP came and members for the Assembly of Experts to write the Constitution were drawn. However, the assassinations since then have seriously depleted the supporters of Khomeini within the ranks of the younger ayatollahs. Thus, it is possible that a majority of second rank ayatollahs now are more sympathetic to the views of the grand ayatollahs.

At least 90 percent of the clergy are not scholars, but preachers. The preachers have been, and continue to be, active supporters of the principle of clerical political involvement. The revolution has provided them with an enhanced status in society. Whereas in the past preaching was regarded as far less prestigious in comparison to expertise in Islamic law and scholarship, preachers now are the de facto political authorities in all the major cities and towns. As the principle

beneficiaries of the new interpretations of Shi'i Islam, the preachers have an important stake in maintaining the new order both at the present and after Khomeini has passed from the scene.

The core group of preachers who support the system belong to the generation born between 1930 and 1950. Overwhelmingly they come from small towns and even rural areas. Many have had a secular education at least through grade school, and in many cases even through high school. They have spent a variable number of years studying under one or more ayatollahs at a madrasseh in a large city. Probably as many as 75 percent of all preachers have studied for at least one year in Qum. The majority of those who completed their seminary schooling prior to 1964 studied under Khomeini at Qum and are among his most loyal, even militant, supporters. In addition, a number of preachers studied under Khomeini while he was teaching at the theological college in Najaf, Iraq from 1965 to 1978.

The preachers are the primary interpreters of Khomeini's ideas to the public, especially the public which attends mosque services regularly. Preaching is not confined to any specific day or time. A religious professional may use any prayer service or religious ceremony as an occasion for preaching; in most city mosques, daily sermons, usually following the evening prayers, have been common since the revolution. The sermons are heavily political in content with religious symbols being used to reinforce the messages conveyed.

Since preachers have become the chief political arbiters at the local level, their sermons tend to be well-attended. Thus, they are in a position to exert influence over the attitudes of thousands of persons. Given their strong sense of loyalty to Khomeini, their commitment to the institutions of the Islamic republic, and their ability to distribute various forms of patronage, the preachers have been able to utilize their sermons effectively to mobilize support for the regime, especially in the middle and lower class sections of the large cities.

The activities of preachers are not limited to delivering political sermons.

The preachers participate in numerous political organizations. They are prominent members of the Revolutionary Committees (komitehs) which have taken on a permanent life in the cities and towns; they are active in the local branches of the IRP; and in the large cities they have their own clerical political action committees. These organizations form interlocking networks which assure the clergy's domination of politics at all levels; the Revolutionary Committees supervise local government; the IRP recruits lay persons, who share the clergy's vision of Iran, to help manage the country; and the political action groups, often called Militant Clergymen Associations, serve as a forum in which clerics can discuss and debate issues of political salience privately.

## 2. The Non-political Clergy

While the clergy in Iran has had an influential role in politics at least since the 1890's, prior to the revolution the prevailing view in the clerical establishment was that the clergy should not involve itself in the actual government of the country. Khomeini's conception of an Islamic Republic in which the government is under the direct supervision of clerics thus represents an innovation in terms of traditional religious ideology. None of the five grand ayatollahs, who in religious scholarship terms are Khomeini's equal, have endorsed completely his vision of rule by the clergy, nor have they accepted his claims to be leading faqih. The most prominent critic has been Ayatollah Sayyid Muhammad Kazem Shariatmadari, but at least two others have also voiced publically their criticisms on various occasions. These grand ayatollahs have considerable support among the senior ayatollahs who share their interpretation of religious doctrine that in the absence of the hidden imam, religion and politics must remain separate spheres, although religious persons should use their authority to influence secular rulers. The junior ayatollahs are more sharply divided, but perhaps as many of half of them agree that clerical political activism is improper. Among the preachers, who constitute the majority of clergymen, there is very little support for the grand ayatollahs at the present time.

The influence of the grand ayatollahs within the clergy is limited by their very conception of politics. Believing that political power is inherently corrupting and therefore that the true religious scholar must avoid overt association with political power, the grand ayatollahs are ill-prepared to deal with a clergy that has come to accept political activism as a virtue. This problem has been most dramatically illustrated in the case of Ayatollah Shariatmadari whose following among the general population is second only to that of Khomeini. When his lay followers formed a political party in 1979 to compete with the IRP set-up by supporters of Khomeini, Shariatmadari was unable to provide it the unambiguous public endorsement required to permit the party to survive the efforts by the IRP to suppress it. Even though Shariatmadari was widely known to share all the positions adopted by "his" party; opposition to the constitution, press censorship, and the taking of the American hostages; support for political pluralism and minority rights; still, philosophically he was not able to adopt a political stance, preferring to retreat to silence as had been his custom and that of the other grand ayatollahs for at least 25 years.

Even though the current influence of the grand ayatollahs is minimal, their potential influence is uncertain. The important fact about them is that they are all active teachers, and thus they are in a position to propagate their interpretations of Islam among the seminary students who will be the future clergy of Iran. In their lectures they do not conceal their opinions about the impropriety of clerical political activism and readily dispute Khomeini's doctrinal interpretations justifying rule by the clergy. Indeed, a primary reason why Khomeini and his associates prevailed upon Ayatollah Montasari to go to Qum and teach in the theological seminary was so that the ideas of the grand ayatollahs could be countered by a senior scholar.

It is too early to predict which interpretation of Islam will prevail in the future; the traditional view of a separation of the clergy from political activity, or Khomeini's view of clerical political rule. There are a number of



factors which seem to encourage a continuation of the revolutionary interpretation; (a) the clerics who have experienced political power will be reluctant to return to the mosques to become simply preachers; (b) the majority of currently enrolled seminary students come from lower class backgrounds and thus support of the concept of clerical political activism is an almost assured means of social mobility; (c) clerical control of the government has meant clerical control of revenues which has provided the clergy with a measure of financial independence; (d) the ability to date of the clergy to keep the population, or at least a significant proportion of it, mobilized and supportive of the new status quo. There are, of course, other factors which might militate against long-term clerical control: (a) the dependence of the government upon a charismatic leader; (b) the tradition of anti-clericalism which is strong within the general culture; (c) the ability of the senior clergy to re-impose their more traditional views once Khomeini has passed from the scene. It is probable that in the future some accommodation of views will be reached between the advocates of the two opposing conceptions of clerical involvement with politics, so that a situation could develop in which the clergy retain considerable political influence, but do not rule directly.

#### B. Lay Politicians

The clergy in Iran could not rule without the support of laymen who provide some of the political cadres, much of the technical and managerial personnel, and the mass memberships for pro-clerical parties and interest groups. As a group lay politicians are even less cohesive than are their clerical counterparts. Nevertheless, it is possible to identify at least two distinct types of non-religious political activists who support the regime. One group consists of those persons who have joined with the clergy in forming the IRP. The other group may be termed simply the non-IRP politicians.

##### 1. The IRP Politicians

The men who have joined the IRP—it has not been possible to verify whether

women are admitted to membership--are the principal lay allies of the clergy. Generally, they come from lower middle class backgrounds, a significant number being from bazaar families. In most cases these men belong to the same generation as the preachers (born between 1930-1954) and represent the first persons in their families to obtain some form of higher education and leave bazaar occupations. Education is an important status symbol for these men and tends to divide them according to the type of institution in which they were trained. In general very few of them have acquired any education in foreign countries; thus there is resentment, even hostility, toward fellow Iranians who have had such opportunities. Much of this animosity can be attributed to the fact that persons with foreign educations were a preferred elite in terms of employment and other opportunities during the pre-revolutionary days. Those members of the IRP who have had any foreign training thus try to downplay their past, for example, the current Foreign Minister, 'Ali Akbar Velayati, who received some advanced medical training in the U.S., emphasizes that his M.D. is from the University of Tehran Medical College; prior to the revolution, the foreign training would have been emphasized and the Iran degree ignored.

Generally speaking, for the men of the IRP the most prestigious degree is from the University of Tehran, the least prestigious from the provincial normal schools; the degrees of the other in-country colleges and universities are perceived as intermediate. Groups, or dowrehs, within the IRP tend to center upon 5 or 6 men who were classmates in college and have maintained ties since completing their studies. An interest in religion was a common bond while students. The ideas of the late Dr. 'Ali Shariati (d. 1977) have been especially appealing to the younger IRP leaders. They were especially attracted to Shariati's equation of the term imam with the Weberian concept of a charismatic leader, and thus came to see Khomeini as having the potential of becoming an imam in this sense. Indeed, these men and their allies among the preachers were primary responsible for popularizing the title of imam in reference to Khomeini during 1978.

to Khomeini

The loyalty of the lay IRP members/is very firm. However, their commitment to clerical rule is less certain. In effect they are agents of clerical politicians. The IRP itself was established by the late Ayatollah Beheshti (d. 1981) and eight clerical associates and has remained under the control of the clergy ever since. Some lay politicians have accommodated to this situation well, for example the late Prime Minister Muhammad 'Ali Raja'i (d. 1981) who accepted clerical direction without apparent protest; indeed, it still is not clear whether Raja'i was ever a formal member of the IRP since he was never part of the lay leadership group of the party, although he did attend its open meetings for the general membership. Other lay politicians who are active in the party are known to have had frequent conflicts with clerical leaders over policy. These include such men as Mir-Hussein Musavi, the current Prime Minister; Behzad Nabavi, Minister of State for Executive Affairs; and 'Ali Akbar Parvaresh, the Deputy Speaker of the Majlis. These latter men have their own visions of what programs to pursue and probably believe that the clergy should be their agents, rather than vice versa, in the revolutionary reconstruction of Iran. However, as long as Khomeini is alive, it is doubtful whether there will be any open break between the more independent minded laymen and the clergy within the IRP. Even after Khomeini has passed from the scene, the relationship between the lay and clerical IRP members is bound to be influenced by how much each group feels need of the support of its rival to help legitimate policies.

## 2. The Non-IRP Politicians

Not all of the politically active persons are members of the IRP. Up until June of 1981 when he was dismissed from office by the majlis, former President Bani-sadr was the most prominent non-IRP politician. Since then there have been considerable reductions in the ranks of independent political activists due to the tendency of the IRP to brand expressions of political opposition as treasonous. Nevertheless, a few individuals have continued to operate openly, most notably Mehdi Barzagan who served as the first revolutionary prime minister

from February to November 1979. Independent lay politicians differ from their counterparts who have joined the IRP in several respects. First, most of them come from upper middle class and wealthy families. Second, they tend to be older, belonging to the generation born between 1920 and 1945. Third, some part of their education was acquired abroad; some even lived abroad for more than five years. Fourth, even though as a group they are religious, they have had extensive contacts with secular Iranians and tend to share the views of the latter on a wide-range of issues. Finally, they have had extensive contacts with the 'ulema, that is the senior and junior ayatollahs, rather than with the preachers, and thus are more sensitive to their views, especially those who disagree with Khomeini's new interpretations of religious dogma.

The one common thread which unites all the independent lay politicians is their feeling of unease over the political direction in which they perceive the Islamic Republic to be moving. The types of criticisms which they have made in such public forums as the majlis include: questioning the need for press censorship; faulting the lack of due process in trials; attacking what they have termed "excesses" in the application of capital punishment; and criticizing the general lack of personal security. While these politicians have been reluctant to date to move into open opposition to the government, they do seem to perceive themselves as some sort of collective conscience of the revolution. Nevertheless, one can reasonably assume that their inability to affect government policies, despite their affirmation of overall support, has weakened their credibility among the general public.

### C. Summary of Political Elites

The revolutionary political elite of Iran is overwhelmingly drawn from the lower middle class. Both the clerical and lay components of this elite accept the legitimacy of a political system in which ultimate authority is vested in a religious scholar whose expertise in Islamic law, particularly the codices of Shi'i law, qualify him to interpret whether proposed legis-

lation is compatible with that divine law which the political elite believe should provide the basis for society. Since there is no basis in recent Shi'i history or tradition for such a view, it has been necessary to mobilize the clergy in support of this new doctrine. This has been done, at least in part, by providing religious preachers a direct role in government at the national, and more especially, the local level. This represents a dramatic role reversal for the preachers who prior to the revolution did not occupy a very high status in society. It has also precipitated a controversy within the hierarchy of the Shi'i clerical establishment about the proper role of the clergy. Equally significant, the elevation to power of the preachers has meant the necessity of lay politicians assuming a more subordinate role in decision making structures. Whether or not these problems develop into conflict generating issues in the future will depend upon the ability of the different elements of the political elite to manipulate the political institutions they have created in a manner which will minimize potential tensions.

## II. The Political Institutions

The most important political offices and structures have been created new specifically for the Islamic Republic. These include the Velayat-i faqih, the Supreme Judicial Council, and the Presidency. In addition other offices have been retained from the monarchy, albeit with modified powers and responsibilities; e.g., the majlis, the prime ministry, and the cabinet system of organizing government. The purpose of these institutions is to maintain the government of the Islamic Republic indefinitely. But the degree to which they will contribute to stability in the future is dependent upon the degree of widespread popular acceptance of the legitimacy of the offices of leadership, in particular the office of velayat-i faqih. Since this office was created especially for Khomeini, finding an appropriate candidate to fill<sup>4</sup> after him may turn into a process of divisive debate among the political elite; this in turn would have a negative impact in terms of the willingness of the public to accept a new faqih.

### A. Velayat-i Faqih

The procedures for choosing a new faqih are rather complicated but should be examined in order to assess how the selection process may affect relationships within the political elite. The constitution provides that the faqih should be the religious jurist who is accepted by the people "as their undisputed leader". With respect to Khomeini there clearly was no dispute as to his leadership role in 1979 when the constitution was ratified and came into effect. But even his support has eroded to some extent, and there is no other religious leader who enjoys the same degree of popular acclaim. The grand ayatollahs are clearly the most learned of the religious scholars, and each has a measure of popular support. However, none of them have ever fully endorsed the concept of velayat-i faqih. Thus, although one of these five men would be the natural candidate for the position, it is very doubtful that either Khomeini or his supporters in the clergy would sanction one of them assuming this office.

Khomeini himself seems to have a candidate to be his own successor. This is his former student Ayatollah Montajzari. Montajzari is the leader of the Tehran clergy, the largest group of clergy in the country (over 2,500 clerics in the capital). He has been identified with Khomeini for years, served in prison under the shah on account of political activism—an important "credential" in post-revolutionary Iran—and was the president of the Assembly of Experts which drafted the present constitution. However, he is not widely regarded as a scholar, and earned considerable notoriety, albeit unfairly, due to the controversial activities of his son in the two years before his assassination in 1981. One of the reasons he was encouraged to go to Qum to teach in the important theological colleges there was to help furbish his image as an Islamic scholar.

The selection of Montajzari as faqih could pose problems from two separate sources within the clergy. Since Montajzari is clearly a second-rank ayatollah (if Khomeini lives for another ten years, then Montajzari would have acquired

sufficient age and presumed scholarly attainment to qualify as a senior ayatollah), his elevation to the position of faqih would not provide him with any religious legitimacy in the eyes of the senior scholars who would then be provided with sufficient evidence for assaults upon the position based upon legal and scholarly arguments. Since Montazari is clearly their junior, their arguments would have considerable weight, even carry precedence over those advanced by Montazari. This is not the situation now since Khomeini is regarded as a senior scholar himself and thus his opinions carry equal weight with other senior scholars. In addition Khomeini has demonstrated his scholarly credentials by authoring religious commentaries and original works while his disciple has yet to publish anything more substantive than collections of his own sermons.

Montazari's selection as faqih could also be resisted by his own peers, that is the other second-rank ayatollahs who are politically ambitious. In this respect Montazari has been aided by the assassinations of so many of the junior ayatollahs during the summer of 1981. His most obvious rival was Ayatollah Beheshti, who although younger than Montazari had begun to earn a genuine reputation as a scholar. Nevertheless, there are still some junior ayatollahs who in terms of status and experience can claim relative equality with Montazari. Most prominent of these are Ayatollahs Mohammad-Reza Mahdavi-Kani and Sayyid Abdul-Karim Musavi-Ardebili. It would not be unreasonable for such men to question <sup>what</sup> upon ~~LEGAL~~ authority Montazari should be accorded special recognition.

Since the revolution Khomeini has demonstrated his political astuteness on several occasions. Thus, it should not be surprising that he was aware of the potential rivalry that could develop over the office of faqih and sought to neutralize this possibility. Accordingly, the constitution provides that if no religious leader is accepted by a majority of the people--although it is not clear how this acceptance or lack thereof is to be tested--then the people are to elect a Council of Experts who in turn will select the faqih

from among several candidates, their choice to be subsequently ratified by the people in referendum. If the Council of Experts are unable to agree upon one person as faqih, then they may set up a leadership council of three to five religious jurists; this leadership council would assume all the duties of the faqih.

These procedures can not eliminate the possibility of either the senior or junior ayatollahs interfering with the process of selecting a new faqih, but by interposing the people as part of the selection process the influence of both groups is considerably weakened. And obviously, if a candidate nominated by the Council of Experts were to win an overwhelming endorsement in a popular referendum, this would serve as effective intimidation to potential challengers within the clerical establishment. Yet the ultimate price for this method of choosing the paramount religious leader must be a redefinition of clerical authority within Shi'i Islam, and possibly the necessity to reformulate doctrine. The senior clergy, who see themselves as the guardians of Shi'i tradition, are well aware of the implications of this innovation as evidenced by their pronouncements. Thus, while they have been willing to acquiesce in political activism on the part of most clergymen, it is less certain whether they will tolerate what they perceive to be threats to the very basis of religious orthodoxy.

### 8. The Judicial Institutions

The several judicial offices, all of which are dominated by the clergy, include the Supreme Court, the High Judicial Council, the Council of Guardians, and the office of Prosecutor General. These institutions represent a complete transference of the legal system out of secular and into clerical hands. The clergy has had no substantive role in legal matters, other than certain aspects of family law, since the 1920's, and even before the codification of secular law under Reza Shah the clergy traditionally shared judicial functions with state appointed lay judges. Consequently, the clergy's assumption of virtually



the entire judiciary has taken place at a time when the teaching of Islamic law has not been emphasized in the theological seminaries for nearly 50 years. The result has been the application of Shi'i legal principles by clerics who are not trained in Shi'i law. The senior clergy has been critical of this practice, at times in very harsh language, and generally have refused to participate in any legal proceedings, a fact which has tended to undermine the legitimacy of the court system.

Court judges are drawn overwhelmingly from the same group of clergy as are the clerical political activists; the preachers. Indeed, in smaller cities and towns the judges and the politicians tend to be the same persons, and it is not uncommon for one preacher to exercise concurrently executive functions as a komiteh official, legislative functions as a member of a town council, and judicial functions as chief judge and prosecutor. Clerics who are able to combine all these offices are quite powerful in local politics. Thus, it is not unusual for them to seek appointments to several offices; in this respect judicial positions are not desirable due to any particular interest in law, but as means of enhancing personal power.

#### ⌚ Executive Institutions

The primary executive offices are the presidency and the prime ministership. The interesting point about these positions has been the rivalry over them <sup>lay</sup> between the clerical and ~~NEEDLE~~ politicians. At one point in 1981 both offices were occupied by members of the clergy, but since November they have been divided: the presidency is held by Hojatoleslam (Preacher) Sayyid 'Ali Khameneh'i, a former student of Khomeini's and current Secretary-General of the IRP; and the Prime Minister is Mir-Hussein Musavi, an architect who founded and served as editor of the newspaper Jumhuri Eslami, the semi-official organ of the IRP. With these two men in office, the IRP for the first time controls both of the principal executive offices of the government; and given the close ties of the IRP to Khomeini, ~~their~~ influence over the office of faqih can be assumed to be considerable.

The IRP's consolidation of control over the executive has provided a measure of governmental stability that heretofore had been lacking. This success, however, has been very costly for the party. Its competition with other political groups has involved progressively more violence resulting in the summer of 1981 of the IRP losing virtually its entire <sup>clerical</sup> leadership core through assassinations. Nevertheless, the very fact the IRP was able to survive this trauma intact, and to drive the main opposition forces underground or into exile, is evidence of the effectiveness of the party in having organized a mass political organization capable of mobilizing widespread support during crises. This victory has also freed the party from the necessity of being preoccupied with methods for dealing with its diverse opponents, and consequently its new leaders can concentrate upon the actual process of governing.

The destruction of IRP opponents as effective political challengers, at least for the present, inevitably will focus the party's attention upon its internal political affairs. In this respect the rivalry between the clerical and lay leaders of the party assumes greater significance. The present manner of dividing the offices of the President and Prime Minister between the two groups may work out to be the best arrangement for managing this rivalry. Prime Minister Musavi, in particular, has a reputation for having co-operated closely with the clerical leaders in the past and is believed to have been especially close to Beheshti even before the revolution. In a very real sense the clerical and lay leaders have a symbiotic relationship with each other. This does not exclude the possibility, however, that ambitious lay politicians who feel frustrated by clerical domination of the party might not attempt to redefine the nature of the clerical-lay relationship in the future; nor can it be determined at this stage how the clergy may react to efforts aimed at diminishing their power in the party since such steps would have certain implications for their political position in general.

#### D. Legislative Institutions

The most important legislative body is the majlis. The majlis was convened for a four-year term in the summer of 1980. Half of its members are clerics, and more than two-thirds are affiliated with the IRP. The speaker is the preacher 'Ali Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani, a former student of Khomeini's, a close associate of the late Beheshti, and a founder of the IRP. Under Hashemi-Rafsanjani's leadership the majlis has been used as the principal vehicle for transforming Iran according to the vision of Khomeini and the IRP. In this process the office of Speaker of the Majlis has become one of the half-dozen most important political offices of the government. In effect, this means that the IRP controls all the important political posts except that of faqih, although it could be argued that Khomeini himself is a de facto member of the IRP.

The majlis is a unique source for gaining some insight into the debates which take place within the IRP. All the sessions of the majlis are televised, and the proceedings are published in the daily newspapers. IRP members have not been concerned with espousing any particular party line, and often majlis speeches are used by less prominent party members to criticize the leadership. A study of such speeches reveals a surprising tolerance for critical comments by clerical politicians, a fact which contrasts very sharply to the intolerant attitude the IRP has displayed toward criticism from all other quarters. If internal debate is as extensive in the non-public meetings of the party, this may help to explain the ease with which the party has been able to replace most of its top leadership following the summer 1981 assassinations. Lack of strict party discipline may also be a factor which aids recruitment of the lower-rank clergy. Of course, there are certain principles to which the IRP is committed, namely the whole concept of Islamic government as embodied in the constitution, and all party members are expected to share this commitment as a condition of membership; otherwise, however, members seem to be accorded considerable discretion in their views regarding the most effective means for implementing this government.

### E. Security Institutions

The political institutions thus far discussed have been designed to insure the continuation of the Islamic government. However, both Khomeini and the IRP leaders have been aware that their conception of Iran is not shared by the entire population. Thus they have created new security institutions and reconstructed pre-revolutionary ones with the intention of having organizations available which can suppress opposition forcibly if necessary. The single most important of these security organizations<sup>is</sup> ~~THE~~ the Revolutionary Guards (pasdaran), a civilian-type militia which is linked to the IRP.

The Revolutionary Guards is composed of young men belonging to the generation born between 1950 and 1963. For the most part their background is urban lower middle and working class in the cities and towns, and peasants in the rural areas. It is unusual for a member of the Revolutionary Guards to have had any higher education, although most of them have completed high school—or are still enrolled in secondary education classes. Many of them had been unable to find satisfactory jobs prior to the revolution, and consequently were alienated from the ancien regime. Indeed, it was these very young who provided the bulk of participants for the numerous mass demonstrations which took place during 1978 and early 1979. Consequently, when the revolution succeeded, these young men flocked en masse to its defense, raiding police stations and army barracks to expropriate weapons. Thus, the Revolutionary Guards ~~SESEZ~~ was created in a de facto manner, almost haphazardly. The clerical politicians, who were forming revolutionary committees throughout the country, were quick to realize the utility of having armed, youthful, and committed supporters attached to their komitehs and thus sought to have their existence legalized and institutionalized.

From the very early stages of the establishment of the Islamic Republic the Revolutionary Guards have been closely identified with the clerical political activists. In many towns it is common for a preacher to serve as an unofficial leader for the Guards. The Guards are the agents of the clerical leaders at both

the national and local levels. Increasingly, this has meant that they are the agents of the IRP. Prior to the summer of 1981 when the IRP controlled only part of the government, it was not uncommon for the Guards to be dispatched by IRP officials to impede or prevent actions by the president. The fact that the ultimate loyalty of the Guards was to the IRP, rather than to the government, was of considerable benefit to the party in its political struggles with anti-IRP politicians and opposition groups.

While the loyalty of the Guards to the revolution has never been questioned, their tendency to act in an undisciplined manner has been a source of controversy and has added to the problems of establishing internal security. Prior to the IRP's consolidation of power, the indiscipline of the guards probably served certain useful purposes vis à vis the opposition. Since the summer of 1981, however, there has been more concern about regulating the behavior of the Guards. An official spiritual guide, in the person of a cleric, has been assigned to the organization to insure that the men are properly indoctrinated in Islamic principles and practices; and some punishments have been meted out to guardsmen who have acted without proper authorization. While the tightening up of discipline—which has yet to be accomplished—may remove some of the arbitrariness out of the relations between the Guards and the general population, it should not affect the effectiveness of the organization as the primary security agency of the IRP government.

The other important security organization is the army. The army was severely affected by the revolution, losing a significant porportion of its senior officers to executions or exile, and most of its recruits to desertion. The war with Iraq has helped to rehabilitate the army to a certain degree. Nevertheless, the army still is believed to be smaller in size than the 200,000-man Revolutionary Guards (estimates of the army's present size range from 90,000 to 160,000 men). Unlike its rival, the Revolutionary Guards, the army has striven to maintain an image of professionalism and political neutrality. There is con-

siderable speculation about the loyalty of the army, but much of this appears to be wishful thinking. The most informed comment that can be made about the army is that it has remained loyal to whatever government is in charge in Tehran. The army even did not come to the defense of Bani-sadr, who was widely believed to have extensive support among all ranks, during his troubles with the IRP during the spring of 1981. While its preoccupation with the war may explain the army's reluctance to become involved in political conflicts, it is equally plausible that there is a diversity of opinion within the army. For example, it is known that some senior officers are close to certain key figures in both the clerical and lay leaderships of the IRP; others are known supporters of the various grand ayatollahs; and still others have ties with avowedly secular politicians. Under these circumstances, avoidance of politics can be the best way of preserving the integrity of the army, an objective which appears to be an overriding concern of the officer corps.

### III. Political Issues

The outstanding political issue in contemporary Iran revolves around the subject of clerical involvement in government. This is as much a topic of debate within the political elite as it is within the general public. For the time being the issue has been decided in favor of the clergy since their control of the government is virtually complete. Three of the four most important offices are presently occupied by members of the clergy: Velayat-i faqih, President of the Republic, and Speaker of the Majlis; in addition, the office of Prime Minister is held by a <sup>lay</sup> person who is a member of the clergy-dominated IRP. Much of the substance of the debate within the elites regarding clerical control has already been discussed, and the potential for factionalizing the elite over this issue has also been addressed. Suffice it to add here that this issue is closely intertwined with all other political issues. That is, as long as there is controversy within the elites over the role of the clergy, the tendency to cast the clergy in the role as heroes or villains of various

economic and social policies will be strong. And this poses the primary political dilemma for the clergy. As long as government policies are successful and enjoy widespread support, the clergy's control of government can be vindicated. But to the degree that policies prove unsuccessful and/or unpopular, so will the prestige of the clergy suffer resulting in serious threats to their continued domination of government.

Other than the role of the clergy, the most pressing issue for the political elite concerns the direction of the ~~PERFECT~~ revolution; that is, should the emphasis of the revolution be on political reforms or on socio-economic reforms. For the politically active clerics the issue has clearly been <sup>of</sup> one/concentrating upon political reforms first. Thus, establishing the institutions of the Islamic Republic have received priority. Most of the clergy do not perceive any necessity to initiate major social and economic changes, believing that the political structures they have created will permit the re-ordering of society according to Islamic principles of justice and <sup>cl</sup>equity. And they have sought to prevent major changes such as the redistribution of that half of agricultural land which was never subjected to land reform under the shah.

The lay allies of the clergy tend to be much more insistent that major social and economic reforms be the priority of the revolution. Accordingly, they have been advocates of land reform, rural development plans, nationalization of major industries, slum clearance and building of low-income housing, and various other projects. For the lay politicians the establishment of the political institutions was not an end, but the means through which other changes could take place. Thus, they are eager to get on with the task of socio-economic reconstruction. The clergy, however, has been able to delay, modify, and in some cases even bloc their various proposals. This has contributed to the tensions which lie below the surface of the clerical-lay alliance.

#### IV. Conclusion

The present political leadership of Iran that emerges from this analysis can be summed up briefly. Since the revolution an alliance of clergy and religiously motivated non-clerics have succeeded in creating an effective, mass political party which they utilize to mobilize support for their programs. This party, the IRP, dominates politics in Iran. The party in turn is dominated by its clerical wing, although none of the senior clergy of the country have joined<sup>the</sup>/IRP. Since its creation, the lay politicians have been junior partners in the IRP, a fact which is a source of resentment among the more ambitious members. However, at least up to the summer of 1981, the IRP's struggle with a diverse array of political opponents had served to keep its internal dissensions under control. The IRP's victory over all opposition and its consolidation of effective control over all branches of the government have helped to bring to the fore the question of which wing should lead the party, and by implication the government: the clerical or the non-clerical. Just how divisive an issue this may become for the political leaders is not clear. In a very real sense, both the clergy and the lay politicians need each other's support to rule, a fact which is appreciated by some of the elites in both wings of the IRP.

The political leaders derive a considerable degree of legitimacy from identification with Ayatollah Khomeini. Thus, their position will be affected by his death. Assuming this will occur within the next ten years (Khomeini is now about 82), this might provide an occasion for the senior clergy, who have not accommodated themselves to the concept of Islamic government espoused by the political elite, to demand a withdrawal of the clergy from politics. Such a move would provoke a major political--and religious--crisis in the country. At the same time a call from the senior clergy for clerical political abstinence could provide the lay activists of the IRP an opportunity to take firm control of the party. Whatever may develop in the future, it can be certain that the IRP, the



only genuine mass political movement to emerge out of the revolution to date, will necessarily have a significant role to play; and its leaders, be they of the clergy or not, will continue to exercise considerable influence in Iranian politics.

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#### APPENDIX A: The Grand Ayatollahs of Iran

1. Sayyid Ruhollah al-Musavi Khomeini, Faqih of the Islamic Republic
2. Muhammad Reza Gulpaygani, resides in Qum
- \*3. Sayyid Shihab al-Din al-Mar'ashi al-Najafi, resides in Qum
- \*4. Sayyid Muhammad Kazem Shariatmadari, resides in Qum
- \*5. Sayyid Abdollah Shirazi-Qummi, resides in Mashhad
- \*6. Sayyid Abu al-Qasim Kho'i, resides in Najaf, Iraq.

\*Indicates has expressed public criticism of the Constitution or role of the clergy in government on more than one occasion since August, 1979.

APPENDIX B: Select List of Principal Clerical Political Elite

Name	Position, 2/1/82
Sayyid 'Ali Khamenehi	President
'Ali Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani	Speaker of the Majlis
Sayyid Abdol-Karim Musavi-Ardebili	Chief Justice of the Supreme Court
Husayn Musavi-Tabrizi	Prosecutor General
Khalkhali, Sadeq	Majlis Deputy
Khamenehi, Muhammad	Majlis Deputy
Khomeini, Sayyid Ahmad	
Khomeini, Sayyid Husayn	
Maadikhah, Abdol-Majid	Minister of National Guidance
Montazari, Ayatollah Husayn 'Ali	
Moqtadari, Morteza	
Mahdavi-Kani, Ayatollah Mohammad Reza	President, Tehran Militant Clergy Assn.
Nateq-Nuri, 'Ali Akbar	Minister of Interior
Reyshari, Mohammad	Chief Justice of Military Courts
Yazdi, Mohammad	Majlis Deputy

APPENDIX C: Select List of Lay Political Elite

Mir-Husein Musavi	Prime Minister
Asghari, Seyyid Mohammad	Justice Minister
Asghar-Owlad Mossalman, Habibollah	Minister of Commerce
Barzagan, Mehdi	Majlis Deputy
Gharavi, Sayyid Mohammad	Oil Minister
Nabavi, Behzad	Minister of State for Ex. Affairs
Namazi, Husayn	Minister of Economy & Finance
Nikraves, Sayyid Kamaledin	Majlis Deputy
Parvares, 'Ali Akbar	Education Minister
Rajai, Saeed	Ambassador to U.N.
Salamat, Mohammad	Minister of Agriculture
Shaybani, Abbas	Majlis Deputy
Tavakkoli, Ahmad	Minister of Labour
Valayati, 'Ali Akbar	Foreign Minister

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